



## **U.S.-China Relations after Sept. 11: Time for a Change** by Jia Qingguo

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon resulting loss of thousands of innocent lives shocked and saddened all people with compassion. The event has broad implications for U.S. foreign policy, international relations in general, and the development of Sino-U.S. relations in particular. Although the actual impact will only be fully understood in years ahead, one can still discern some emergent features. Three of them warrant special attention for relations between the United States and China in the new counter-terrorism era.

First, the attacks will likely change U.S. security strategy from one focused on potentially hostile countries armed with weapons of mass destruction and the missiles to deliver them to one targeting a more amorphous enemy: international terrorism. Prior to Sept. 11, many in the United States had nation-states in mind when they developed security strategies to meet security challenges. During the better part of the 1990s, they were concerned with Iraq and other so-called "rogue" states. Since the end of the 1990s, they have increasingly turned their attention to China.

The Sept. 11 attacks highlighted the fact that the real enemy is international terrorism and not any particular country. It also underscored the fact that missile defense (MD) is probably the least cost-effective way to attain security for the U.S. Although one still hears some influential Americans talking about MD's role as an anti-terrorist instrument, the system can only deal with the least likely form of terrorism - at best. The U.S. is likely to conclude that it has neither the time nor the resources to invest in a very expensive program that only deals with one of the least likely security challenges to the U.S. Should U.S. policy lower the priority of missile defense in its overall strategy, it would have a positive impact on U.S.-China relations. Chinese strategists worry that MD would nullify China's very limited deterrent capability while undermining international stability. China would have greater incentives to cooperate with Washington if the latter does not focus on missile defense.

Second, the attacks are likely to moderate Washington's foreign policy in a way that gives greater favor to multilateralism. Before Sept. 11, Washington was increasingly on the path of unilateralism as a means to address international and security issues. After Sept. 11, Washington has given more attention to international cooperation as its efforts to rally international support for the war against terrorism demonstrate. Terrorism is an international phenomenon and no country can fight it effectively without the help of other countries. More important, this multilateral effort over the long run will need to address the sources of terrorism: polarization of the world, religious and

ethnic conflicts, inadequate international law enforcement cooperation, and weak international organizations. So long as these and other problems remain unresolved, terrorism will pose a security threat to the U.S. and other countries. In developing multilateral coalitions to fight both the causes and symptoms of international terrorism, the U.S. will find China a useful and cooperative partner.

Finally, in the aftermath of the attacks, we will see less focus on China as a strategic competitor or a potential enemy. The Sept. 11 attacks illustrated that the real threat to American freedom and way of life does not come from China but from international terrorism. Obviously, this threat is capable of changing American life - greater restrictions on freedoms, more inconveniences, and continued threats of terrorist attack - in a way no country in the world was capable of doing even if it had wanted to.

As long as Washington does not focus on Beijing as a potential enemy, it can examine U.S.-China relations in a more objective way and reduce unnecessary confrontation. The same is true for China. Those persons in both countries who wish to see a confrontation between the U.S. and China will be constrained from doing so. Moreover, given their shared interests in countering terrorism, Washington and Beijing are likely to be more pragmatic and cooperative in dealing with each other.

It goes without saying that the two countries will have many problems in the years ahead. They will continue to differ on what constitutes protection of human rights in China, the pace of democratization in China, the meaning of free and fair trade, the role of international organizations, and the resolution of differences across the Taiwan Strait. However, united by the common cause of anti-terrorism, the two countries are in a better position to find more constructive ways to deal with these problems than before.

Dedicated students of the United States understand that one of its greatest strengths is its ability to reflect on its vulnerabilities and weaknesses and constantly improve itself. It has done so time and time again, and became greater and stronger as a result. One has good reason to believe that Americans and their leaders will do so again. If so, we can hope the day will come when Washington and Beijing can celebrate victories against international terrorism while realizing a constructive and mutually beneficial relationship between these two great countries.

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